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Viewing cable 09TEGUCIGALPA615, TFHO1: THE AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH DEFENSE CHIEF

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#09TEGUCIGALPA615.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09TEGUCIGALPA615	2009-07-17 21:58	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET//NOFORN	Embassy Tegucigalpa

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.wikileaks.elfaro.net/es/201105/notas/4258/>

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TFHO1, HO

SUBJECT: TFHO1: THE AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH DEFENSE CHIEF VASQUEZ

REF: A/S SHANNON-AMBASSADOR LLORENS TELCON 07/16/09

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reason 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: The Ambassador and DATT met with Honduran Chief of Defense (CHOD) MG Romeo Vasquez Velasquez to press the importance of the de facto regime's serious participation in the Arias-led negotiations on July 18, as well as the repercussions if the talks do not show substantive progress. The Ambassador reiterated the firm USG position that the democratic and constitutional order be restored rapidly. Vasquez agreed to deliver this message to de facto regime President Micheletti. Vasquez expressed his own willingness to support a negotiated resolution and restoration of President Zelaya, but noted the armed forces were concerned that civilian politicians would make them the scapegoat for the coup and crisis. End summary.

¶2. (S/NF) The Ambassador and DATT met with Vasquez at a neutral location in accordance with Department guidance (Ref). The Ambassador informed Vasquez he was under instructions to make a major effort to reach out to key Honduran political, business and civil society figures to convince them of the critical importance that the de facto Micheletti regime engage in serious negotiations in the next mediation round sponsored by President Arias on June 18 in San Jose. He reiterated the U.S. and international community insistence that the democratic and constitutional order be re-established and that the legitimate President of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, be restored to office. The Ambassador stressed the Arias mediation effort offered the most viable diplomatic channel to restore the democratic order but also took into consideration the concerns of Zelaya's opponents and the de facto regime's supporters.

¶3. (S/NF) The Ambassador expressed concern that failure to make substantive progress on July 18 could result in the collapse of the Arias effort, which would bring about significant negative consequences for Honduras and only assure the international community would take a harder line. The Ambassador also stressed that failure to resolve the crisis soon would force the USG to adopt punitive measures against both the de facto regime and the individuals responsible for the coup and the continuation of the crisis. (Note: Unstated but understood was the likelihood of the revocation of visas for individuals the USG deemed culpable for the crisis. End note.)

¶4. (S/NF) The Ambassador underscored the longstanding support and friendship the USG and the people of the United States held for Honduras. He said the United States had always valued Honduras as a democratic ally, and that the United States remained firm in its commitment to democracy in Honduras. He noted the restoration of the democratic order would allow for normalization of bilateral relations and mil-mil cooperation. He urged Vasquez to approach the de facto regime leadership and Micheletti himself to press them on the importance of engaging in serious negotiations under the Arias effort.

¶5. (S/NF) Vasquez initially discussed the armed forces' (HOAF) effort to avoid being dragged into the political crisis caused by President Zelaya's struggle with his opponents over his desired referendum, i.e. the "Fourth Urn." But in the end, he said, the HOAF had been manipulated by all sides. Vasquez attempted to justify the coup action, asserting that the military was simply following the orders of the Supreme Court on June 28. He said he had always been loyal to President Zelaya but the Supreme Court's order was constitutional. Vasquez then lamented that Micheletti and

his advisors were the same people who were unable to show flexibility before the events of June 28, stubborn and aggressive. Vasquez said Micheletti and his core team continue to take a hard line. Nevertheless, after extensive discussion Vasquez agreed that in the interest of the Honduran people and U.S. relations he would go to Micheletti

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and convey the Ambassador's message. Vasquez added the timing of the Ambassador's visit was opportune, because he would be going directly to a meeting at the Presidential Palace to discuss the negotiating strategy for July 18.

16. (S/NF) Speaking in general about the current situation, Vasquez noted the most difficult obstacle for the success of the mediation was the almost pathological fear of Zelaya and his association with Venezuelan President Chavez, held not only by the leadership of the de facto regime, but of the overwhelming majority of their supporters. While Vasquez understood the diplomatic balance sheet argued for supporting the Arias process, an early return of Zelaya could weaken Honduran democratic institutions. He added that while the threatening rhetoric of Chavez and Zelaya was intense, his own view was that Zelaya's support was on the decline in the country. Vasquez said HOAF intelligence revealed that a significant amount of Venezuelan funding was pouring into social sectors to build support for the pro-Zelaya movement, but that nationwide no more than 7,500 people were participating in the week's pro-Zelaya demonstrations, indicating waning support.

17. (S/NF) Comment: Vasquez seems torn but we believe he is looking for the U.S. to help him find a way out and will carry our message to the Micheletti camp. What is also clear is that the HOAF is increasingly concerned they will be left holding the bag or made into the villain in this crisis. Whatever deal is made, the military leadership must be kept in the loop in order for it to succeed. End comment.
LLORENS